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SQUEM
AND
SOME MALE TRIANGLES

Arthur Russell Taylor

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Arthur
Taylor

MR. SQUEM AND SOME MALE TRIANGLES

ARTHUR RUSSELL TAYLOR

MR. SQUEM AND SOME MALE TRIANGLES

BY

ARTHUR RUSSELL TAYLOR

"Frankly accept the creatureship"

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TO MY WIFE

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MR. SQUEM AND SOME MALE TRIANGLES

I

A RAILWAY EPISODE: GOD AND CULTURE

"WHY do we go on perpetuating an uncomfortable breed?"

The man who was shaving at the mirror-panelled door of the Pullman smoking compartment looked at his questioner on the leather seat opposite.

"Give it up," he answered. "Why is a hen?"

The first man rapped his pipe empty on the edge of a cuspidor.

"You answer the question," he said,

"in the only possible way—by asking another."

"Right," answered the shaver, and began to run the hot water.

A closely built man, in a suit so heavily striped as to seem stripes before it was a suit, lurched into the compartment and settled himself to his paper and cigar.

"That monkey-on-a-stick," he presently broke out, "is still taking good money away from the asses who go to hear him rant about God and Hell and all the rest, up in Boston. I am so *damn* tired of him, and of that rich rough-neck Freeze. It's the limit."

"Pretty much," said the man with the pipe. "I was reading about the Belgians just before you came in, and when I jumped away from them I lit on some things about Poland. Then I wondered aloud to this gentleman why we go on multiplying—increasing such

an uncomfortable breed. Modoc gods and degenerate millionaires make one wonder more."

"What is your line, may I ask?" inquired the stripe-suited man.

"Religion."

"The hell—I beg pardon. If you mean you're a preacher, or something like that, all I've got to say is, you're a funny one. It's your job, isn't it, to be dead sure that everything's all right, or somehow going to be all right —no matter about all the mussed-upness? Yes, that's certainly your job. Yet here you are, asking why we go on stocking the world with kids. *I* might ask that,—I'm in rubber tires,—but not you. Yes, I might—only I don't."

The man who had been shaving had resumed his tie, collar, and coat, and now lighted a cigarette.

"I lay my money," he said, "on one thing: that, if men let themselves go,

they wind up shortly with God—or with what would be God if there were any. You've come to it early—through the *Ledger*. You'd have got to it sooner or later, though, if you'd been talking about hunting-dogs—provided you'd have let yourselves go."

"Well, now," asked the closely built man, "what is *your* line?"

"Education."

"High-brow company! Seems to me the pair of you ought to be silencers for a plain business man like me. Rubber is my line—not how the world is run. My opinion on that is small change, sure. Yet I think it ought to be run,—the world, I mean,—even if it's mussed-up to the limit, and I think it's up to us to keep it running. The parson here—if he is a parson—asks why we should; that is, if I get him. And then I think there's a manager of it all in the central office—a manager, under-

stand, though he never seems to show up around the works, and certainly does seem to have some of the darnedest ways. The professor here—if he is a professor—doesn't sense any manager; that is, if I get him straight, with his 'if there were any.' That was what you said, wasn't it? I'm a picked chicken on religion and education, but, honest, both those ideas would mean soft tires for me—yes, sir, soft tires."

"Broad Street, gentlemen," said the porter at the door.

The Reverend Allan Dare walked away from the train and down the street. He was Episcopally faced and Episcopally trim, and he was having considerable difficulty in holding his universe together. This is not pleasant at forty-two, when you want your universe held together and things settled and calm. He had an uncomfortable

sense that this difficulty had jolted into plain sight on the car.

"Ass!" he addressed himself briefly. "To let your sag and unsettlement loose in that way! To say such a thing as you said, and in such a place! To parade your momentary distrust of life! Ass—oh, ass!"

He said—or thought—a Prayer-Book collect, one which seemed rather suited to asses, and continued,—

"I suppose I'm three-tenths sag—no more; and 'He knoweth whereof we are made,' and what a devil of a world it is to be in just now. But that rubber man on the car—he isn't sag at all. Heavens, his crudeness! His beastly clothes, and the bare shaved welt around the back of his neck, and that awful seal ring! But he's fastened. Life is worth pushing at and cheering for—and there's a manager, if he *has* 'the darnedest ways.' I'd give some-

thing for an every-minute mood like that—a carrying night-and-day sureness like that. He's not illuminated—lucky dog!"

Professor William Emory Browne had changed cars and was continuing his journey. In his lap lay a volume of essays just put forth by a member of his craft, a college professor. He opened it,—it chanced at page 27,—and his eye was caught by the name of his own specialty. He read:—

"Philosophy is the science which proves that we can know nothing of the soul. Medicine is the science which tells that we know nothing of the body. Political Economy is that which teaches that we know nothing of the laws of wealth; and Theology the critical history of those errors from which we deduce our ignorance of God."

"Confound it!" ejaculated Professor Browne, and closed the book.

"Room for one more?" inquired a voice, and the rubber-tire man slid into the seat.

"I just pulled off a little thing out here," he said, "that ought to put a small star in my crown. A down-and-out—a tough looker—says to me, '*Please,* mister, give me a dime. I'm hungry.' And I says to him, 'Get out! What you want is a good drink,—go get it,' and slips him a quarter. Talk about gratitude! To think there are men—you know it and I know it and he was afraid of it—who'd have steered him to a quick-lunch and put him against soft-boiled eggs!"

" 'Man's inhumanity to man' "——

"Sure! Nothing but that ever makes me any trouble about things. Tear ninety, George,"—this to the conductor,—"and burn this panetella some

time. You said you were in education," he went on. "I've just blown myself to a Universal History—five big volumes, with lots of maps and pictures and flags of all nations and hanging gardens of Babylon and things like that. Gave down thirty-five for it, and my name is printed—Peter B. Squem—on the first page of every book. Now,"—Mr. Squem grew quite earnest,—"you'd say, wouldn't you, that if a man could take those books down,—chew them up, you understand, and take them down,—he'd have an education? Not the same, of course, as normal school or college, and yet an education."

"I think, if you know what's good for you, you will steer clear of what you call an education. I think I should stick to rubber tires, and a few comfortable certainties—and peace."

Mr. Squem stared. "How's that?"

he inquired. "Education is your line, you were saying, and yet you queer your stuff. I'd get quick word from the house, if I handled Mercury tires that way."

"But you wouldn't," rejoined Professor Browne, "you wouldn't, because tires mean something. Tires are your life-preserver—they are shaped like life-preservers, aren't they?"

"You've got me going," said Mr. Squem, "and no mistake. I don't mind telling you I'd hoped to get some hunch from you—on education. You see, my clothes are right, I always have a room with bath, and I get two hundred a month and fifty on the side. I read the papers—and the magazine section on Sunday—and I got through four books last year. And yet there's something not there—by Keefer, not there! I'd give something to *get* it there—to slide it under, somehow, and bring the rest

of me up to regular manicuring and ice-cream forks and the way my clothes fit!"

Mr. Squem was interrupted in the expression of this craving. There was a tremendous jar; the car tore and bumped with an immense pounding over the ties, then careened and sprawled down a short bank and settled on its side. People who have been through such an experience will require no description. To others none can be given. In the bedlam chaos and jumble, and chorus of shrieks and smashing glass, Professor Browne, struggling up through the bodies which had been hurled upon him, was conscious of a pain almost intolerably sharp in his leg, and then of a sort of striped whirlwind which seemed to be everywhere at once, extricating, calming, ordering, comforting—and swearing. It was like a machine-gun:—

"*Keep* your clothes on, nothing's going to bite you—just a little shake-up —Yes, chick, we'll find your ma—No, you *don't* climb over those people; sit down or I'll help you—To hell with your valise, pick up that child!—There go the axes; everybody quiet now, just where he is—You with the side-whiskers get back, *back*, hear me!—Now, children first, hand 'em along—women next, so—men last—Why didn't you *say* you was a doctor? Get out there quick, some of those people have got broke and need you!"

Professor Browne was one of these last. Lifted by Peter Squem and a very scared brakeman, he lay on two Pullman mattresses at the side of the track, waiting for the rabbit-faced country doctor to reach him. He was suffering very much,—it seemed to him that he had never really known pain before,—but his attention went to a

white-haired lady near by—a slight, slender woman, with breeding written all over her. She had made her way from the drawing-room of the Pullman, and leaned heavily upon her maid, in a state approaching collapse. Professor Browne was impressed by her air of distinction even in the midst of his pain. Then he saw a striped arm supportingly encircle her, and a hand dominated by an enormous seal ring press to her lips an open bottle of Scotch.

"Let it trickle down, auntie—right down. It's just what you need," said Peter B. Squem.

"What did you think of when the car stopped rolling?"

Professor Browne, lying in his bed, asked this question of Mr. Squem, sitting at its side. The latter had got the professor home to his house and his housekeeper after the accident the day

before, had found the best surgeon in town and stood by while he worked, had in a dozen ways helped a bad business to go as well as possible, and now, having remained over night, was awaiting the hour of his train.

"Think of? Nothing. No time. I was that crosseyed boy you've heard about—the one at the three-ringed circus. *Did* you see that newly-wed rooster—I'll bet he was that—the one with the celluloid collar? 'Good-bye, Maude!' he yells, and then tries to butt himself through the roof. He wouldn't have left one sound rib in the car if I hadn't pinned him. No, I hadn't anytime to think."

He produced and consulted a watch —one that struck the professor as being almost too loud an ornament for a Christmas tree. An infant's face showed within as the case opened.

"Your baby?" inquired Professor Browne.

"Never. Not good enough. This kid I found—where do you suppose? On a picture-postal at a news-stand. The picture was no good—except the kid; and I cut him out, you see. Say, do you know the picture was painted by a man out in Montana? Yes, sir, Montana. They had the cards made over in Europe somewhere,—Dagoes, likely, —and when they put his name on it, they didn't do a thing to that word Montana. Some spelling!"

"Why, what you have there," said the professor, taking the watch with interest, "is the Holy Child of Andrea Mantegna's Circumcision,—it's in the Uffizi at Florence. Singularly good it is, too. I'm very much wrapped up in the question, raised in a late book, of Mantegna's influence upon Giovanni Bellini. There's a rather fine point

made in connection with another child in this same picture—a larger one, pressing against his mother's knees."

Mr. Squem was perfectly uncomprehending. "Come again," he remarked. "No, you needn't, either, for I don't know anything about the rest of the picture. I told you it was no good. There was an old party in a funny bath-robe and with heavy Belshazzars, I remember—but the picture was *this*."

He rose and began to get into his overcoat.

"There's one thing about this kid," he said, in a casual tone which somehow let earnestness through. "I know a man,—he travels out of Phillie, and he's some booze-artist and other things that go along,—who's got one of those little 'Josephs.' You know, those little dolls that Catholics tote around? Separate him from it? Not on your

life. Why, he missed it one night on a sleeper, and he cussed and reared around, and made the coon rout everybody out till he found it. It's luck, you see. Now this kid"—Mr. Squem was pulling on his gloves—"isn't luck, but he works like luck. He talks to me, understand, and"—here a pause—"he puts all sorts of cussedness on the blink. You can't look at him and be an Indian. I was making the wrong sort of date in Trenton one day, and I saw him just in time—sent the girl word I'd been called out of town. I was figuring on the right time to pinch a man in the door,—he'd done me dirty,—and I saw *him* again. Good-night! I'm never so punk that he doesn't ginger me—doesn't look good to me. The management is mixed up with him—and I hook up to him. Here's the taxi. So long, professor.—Rats! I haven't done one

little thing. Good luck to your game leg!"

It was Sunday morning, and service was under way in the Church of the Holy Faith. For the thousandth time the Reverend Allan Dare had dearly beloveded his people, assembled to the number of four hundred before him, exhorting them in such forthright English as cannot be written nowadays, not to dissemble nor cloak their sins before God, and to accompany him unto the throne of the heavenly grace. He had had a sick feeling, as he read this exhortation, so full of pound, rhythm, heart-search, and splendid good sense, to the courteous abstractedness in the pews.

"Heavens!" he had thought, "once this burnt in!" He had wanted to shriek—or fire a pistol in the air—and then crush the meaning into his people;

crush God into them, yes, and into himself.

He was four-tenths sag that morning —the Rev. Allan Dare. In the *Jubilate,* a small choir-boy—a phenomenon who was paid a thousand a year, and was responsible for the presence of not a few of the four hundred—had sung "Be ye sure that the Lord he is God," to the ravishment of the congregation —not of the rector, who stood looking dead ahead. The First Lesson had been all about Jonadab, the son of Rechab, and drinking no wine—frightful ineptness! What could it mean to any one? how help any one? Here was Life, with all its cruel tangles, tighter and more choking every day. Here was Arnold's darkling plain, and the confused alarms and the ignorant armies clashing by night.

There came back to Dare the creed he had heard in the smoking compart-

ment: "I think it ought to be run,—the world,—even if it's mussed-up to the limit, and I think it's up to us to keep it running. I think there's a manager of it all in the central office—a manager, understand, though he never seems to show up around the works, and certainly does seem to have some of the darnedest ways."

"O God!" breathed Allan Dare, "there are so many things—so many things!"

It was the same Sunday. Professor William Emory Browne was for the first time on crutches, and stood supported by them at his window.

"Back again," he ruminated. "I can probably drive to my classes in another week. Then the same old grind, showing ingenuous youth—who fortunately will not see it—how "the search hath taught me that the search is vain." Ho,

hum! How very kind, that Mr. Squem, —he did so much for me,—and how very funny! I should like to produce him at the seminar—with his just-right clothes, his dream of culture *via* his Universal History, his approach to reality through a picture postal card!"

He turned on himself almost savagely. Then,—

"What the devil are you patronising him for? Don't you see that he is hooked to something and you are not, that he is warm and you are freezing, that he is part of the wave,—the wave, man, —and that you are just a miserable, tossing clot?"

It was the same Sunday. Mr. Squem sat in his room—extremely dennish, smitingly red as to walls, oppressive with plush upholstery. A huge deer-head, jutting from over the mantel, divided honours with a highly-coloured

September Morn, affrontingly framed. On a shelf stood a small bottle. It contained a finger of Mr. Squem, amputated years before, in alcohol.

On the knees of the owner of the room was Volume One of the Universal History—Number 32, so red-ink figures affirmed, of a limited edition of five hundred sets. Mr. Squem's name was displayed, in very large Old English on the fly-leaf, and above was an empty oval wherein his portrait might be placed.

"No use," soliloquised the owner of this treasure, "no use. If I *could* chew it up and get it down—or two of it—*that* wouldn't slide under the thing that isn't there. Nothing will ever put me in the class of Professor Browne or that preacher on the car, or bring the rest of me up to my clothes."

He rose and stretched.

"Maybe," he said, addressing a huge

chocolate-coloured bust of an Indian lady, "maybe I can catch up to those fellows some time—but not here. Noon, I bet,"—looking at his watch,—"and it is to eat."

He contemplated the Mantegna baby.

"So long," he said, "you're running things"—and snapped his watch.

II

A COUNTRY-HOUSE EPISODE: BEING A GENTLEMAN

"A GOOD-LOOKER and a high hooker!" This was the verdict of Mr. Squem upon Miss Cynthia Browne.

Professor William Emory Browne had been asked down to the country-house of his widower brother, on the ocean, to dine and stay the night, and his niece had written him to bring any one he liked.

The professor had at once thought of Mr. Squem, travelling representative of the Mercury Rubber-Tire Company, to whom he was indebted for services openhandedly rendered in a pinch—a

railway accident. "Just the way to recognise him," thought the professor, and was rather comfortable. Indeed, reflecting upon the opportunity thus opened to Mr. Squem, he almost glowed. Behind was the feeling—a bit zestful—that in this way he would be exhibiting to his brother's household a unique and quite amusing person—providing the party with an experience. A singular blend of motives, which Mr. Squem could not possibly have understood.

Professor Browne's brother had come into the world and lived in the world with just one object—to make a million dollars. This he had done, and there seemed nothing more to say. Yes, one thing more: he had fathered Cynthia, now a girl of twenty-two, with the ghost of a soul-starved mother—who, in common with everything else, had stood aside for the million dollars

—looking out of her eyes. The brother, the brother's daughter, and a Mr. Dudley Ledgerwood, were the people whom Professor Browne invited Mr. Squem to the country-house to meet—and to amuse.

Mr. Squem arrived in state, bearing a large suit-case and a hat-box, the latter's maiden appearance, though it had been a treasured possession for five years. The house and its scale impressed him, and particularly a fountain—copy of Verrocchio's Boy with the Dolphin—well placed before the main entrance; but he could not help feeling a certain bareness, not to say meagreness, in the room to which he was conducted by the very correct maid. True, Tony's Seven Chair Sanitary Shaving Parlor was not more immaculate, and if he knew a good bed, there it was; but the room lacked in colour-warmth,—Mr. Squem thought of

his own green carpet and red walls,—there were but three wall pictures, and they most unstriking, and the mantel was destitute of such decorative bric-à-brac, picked up at Atlantic City and elsewhere, as the guest loved. Mr. Squem noted these limitations, then adjured himself to "quit knocking," and proceeded to dress for dinner. He was the only one who did, the butler excepted, the three other gentlemen being in light summer clothes.

Miss Cynthia greeted him with frank cordiality; rarely had his "pleased to meet you" received so warming a come-back. She was a thoroughbred—her features, her carriage, her total, persuaded Mr. Squem of that. Yes, a thoroughbred—a good-looker and a high-hooker! Her father came out of his million-dollar grave long enough to assure the visitor that he was welcome, and then ceased to exist, and Mr. Dud-

ley Ledgerwood bowed faintly, looking over Mr. Squem's head.

This Mr. Ledgerwood was a life-weary person of thirty-five, with the bored expression of one permanently waiting for a train. He seemed chronically tired, but not so tired as certain who encountered him. He had trained a really capable mind upon things which he was certain were affected by very few. He wrote—always from a quite Olympian standpoint—occasional reviews of books for magazines of limited circulation, and was suspected of having dark designs upon a Book of his own. He was bare of any convictions, their place being taken by a passion for being—different. So his life went in dissatisfiedly sniffing things. His thoughts were not intentionally other people's thoughts, or his ways, where he could help it, their ways. A mys-

terious providence had given him considerable money.

The dinner struck Mr. Squem as an all-right thing and function, although simpler than at some hotels he knew, and he wondered a bit that there was no orchestra. They had scarcely finished the soup before Professor Browne, thinking it time for the entertainment to begin, remarked,—

"Mr. Squem, though an active man of affairs, is no stranger to liberal culture. Perhaps he will tell you about his Universal History."

"No good," said Mr. Squem with decision, "*no* good! You see,"—he frankly took in the company,—"I only got as far as the sixth grade—and you know you feel that, when you begin to shuck the day coach for the Pullman and have your clothes built for you and hang out at four-per hotels. You sure do. Something isn't there. I felt it

after I got to giving sixty straight for a sack-suit, and after I got my car—some car, believe *me!* Well, I was telling the professor here how maybe I could put it there—the thing that wasn't—by chewing up a thirty-five dollar Universal History I bought—something elegant and classy. But it was no go—no go. I want to tell you I lit into that thing for fair—loaded up on the pyramids and the Monroe Doctrine and radium and a lot of other things. But it didn't put over what wasn't there,—not one little bit,—and I kept on getting up against people who made me feel it. So I say it was no good,—relish an olive, Miss Browne?—I gave it to the Home for the Friendless."

"Lamentable!" said Mr. Ledgerwood. "Really——"

A diversion came at this point, the punctilious butler for the first recorded time spilling something. It was mush-

room sauce, and a very little trickled down the left and right arms of Mr. Squem and Mr. Ledgerwood, seated side by side. The latter bent upon the man a look which might have penetrated armour-plate. He was extremely irritated and let it be seen. Not so Mr. Squem.

"Whoa, George!"—he beamed reassuringly upon the unhappy butler. "I'm no Lillian Russell. No milk-baths for me!"

Miss Cynthia instantly covered up.

"So sorry," she said, "so very sorry!" And then hurriedly: "Oh, I do so thank you, Mr. Ledgerwood, for the picture—my note was the poorest thing. Will you try to know what a satisfaction it is, and what a prize to own? I'm going to have it brought—my uncle must see it. You'll envy me," she added to Professor Browne.

Then there was borne in, and placed

for all to see, such a painting as Mr. Squem had never in all his days, outside a junk-shop, beheld; a copy of the Recanati Annunciation of Lorenzo Lotto; exceedingly old and dingy, and with blisters here and there—a fearful wreck, in a woefully tarnished frame! Why was it there?

"Well enough," said Mr. Ledgerwood with languor, as candles were shifted here and there before the canvas, "and by way of being early—fairly early. Of course it's been 'comforted' a bit. The vehicle is reasonably clear, with something of the original's subtle qualities of tint." (He had cribbed this phrasing from Mr. Berenson.) "The lights and shadows, too, are treated with—ah, genuine science, as there. Does the cat here at all suggest the lion of the Hamburg St. Jerome, Professor Browne?"

Professor Browne was—as Mr.

Ledgerwood devoutly hoped would be the case—unable to say, and further conversation permitted a display of impressive connoisseurship—worth giving a picture for any day. At length the professor turned to the silent and still astonished Mr. Squem.

"What do you think of the picture?" he asked. "How does it appeal to you?"

What Mr. Squem really thought, and what he had for some moments been affirming to himself, was that the whole thing was enough to make a man swallow his tonsils. What he said, surveying the cat affrighted at the angel, was,—

"Some scared pussy!"

A silence followed, which at length pricked him to a sense of his guest's duty. "Just been out to Denver," he said, "over the Q. First time in years. It's a spry burg, and no shrinking vio-

let, either. Something happened to me there once."

"Tell us about it," urged Professor Browne with ringmaster's readiness.

"Well, you see it was this way—no spinach for me, thanks. I was on my first long trip. Hadn't been west of Pittsburg before, and I never hope for a ride like that again. Gee! those brush-balls rolling over the prairie—hundreds and hundreds of 'em rolling and rolling! Spookish things. And the wooden-toothpick fence-posts—m i l e s and miles of *them*. Then old Pike's looming up, not twenty minutes off, you'd bet; near enough to spit on, you'd say, but staying there, just staying there, for hours! A Denver man in the seat ahead says, 'I *thought* it would make your jaw drop on your wish-bone' —and he was right. It was great!"

"*Hæc olim,*" volunteered Mr. Ledgerwood, with a touch of chill.

"We didn't stop at that place," said Mr. Squem. "It was an express. Well, I went into the diner an hour this side of Denver—anything I can reach you, Mr. Browne?—and when I'd squared for my meal, do you know, I had just sixty-seven cents left? Sixty-seven cents,—and I didn't know a soul in Colorado,—not a soul! Figured I'd be about three days too soon to find a draft from the house, and my only baggage was one of these bird-size grips. Well, I took a hack at the station for White's Palace Hotel,—it hurt me fifty cents,—and I stood up at the green-marble counter and hancocked the register and asked for my mail. Nothing doing, as I supposed. No mail. So there I was, a right smart from home, as they say in Baltimore, with nothing I could put up for my board and nobody in the state I could strike for a dollar. They'd had an awful pest of

hotel-beats, too, with smooth stories, just before—and *me* there, with seventeen cents!"

"What a situation!" said Miss Browne. "But surely there was the telegraph."

"Nobody was taking any chances on collect-wires East," said Mr. Squem. "They'd as soon set up mileage to Chicago. *That* would have meant a swift kick. As I said, others had been there before me, and some of them were doing time right then."

"What *did* you do?" Miss Cynthia was keen with the question.

"I went and bought a shave," said Mr. Squem. "I needed it. While the mahogany brother was mowing me,—it was a tonsorial parlour I was in, not a shop,—he says, 'You need a haircut,' and I says, 'I need the *price*'—and told him all about it. 'Why,' he says, 'you look good to me. Have the

hair-cut, and this shave, too, on the place, till you get your letter. Sure, that's all right.' "

Mr. Squem fingered his demi-tasse a moment, then said slowly—

"That coon was sure an answer to prayer; I *was* up against it. He'll never know what he did for me, but I've never forgot him. I've been giving twenty-five a year to Shiloh Baptist Church ever since. Well, I had the hair-cut, and a sea-foam, too, and got out of the chair and let him chalk it up. I wanted to celebrate some way, for my nerve was back, so I went to the bar and got a grown person's drink. It was fifteen cents, and I had two cents left. Then I leaned down by the bar and dropped the two cents in a spittoon and went broke."

Miss Cynthia's eyes snapped.

"Then," continued Mr. Squem, "I walked straight up to the hotel desk,

as independent as a hog on ice,—excuse me, Miss Browne,—and says to the lady-cashier, 'Ten dollars, please, and charge to Room 17.' "

"Aplomb!" interjected Mr. Ledgerwood.

"No, not a plum," said Mr. Squem, "a peach. She was a peach. She pushed the ten right across. Seemed kind of sorry I hadn't made it ten more. I did, two days later, and it came just as easy. She sensed the confidence in me, see—the ginger that barber put there. I never could have done it without him. On the fourth day my draft came and I was on Easy Street."

Mr. Ledgerwood had not enjoyed this narrative in the least, and the less because Miss Cynthia evidently had. She was not merely amused: she was positively—it seemed to him almost admiringly—interested. Said he, with an access of sourness,—

"*Chacun à son goût.* Travelling about in that happy-go-lucky way—with insufficient funds—smells of the *canaille.* It has a suggestion of vagrancy."

"You mean I was going too short?" inquired Mr. Squem innocently. "Well, just that morning I'd had a twenty-dollar yellow-back pinned to my undershirt,—excuse me, Miss Browne,—but I met a man on the train,—selling on commission he was, and business had been bum,—who'd been wired to come home to a mighty sick kid, and he hadn't the money to get there. His mileage was out and he was going to be put off. So I had to unpin the twenty."

Miss Cynthia leaned forward. "That was *dear* of you!" she said impulsively.

Mr. Squem looked puzzled. "Had to do it, of course," he said. "Anybody would."

As the party rose from the table, he left a silver dollar at his place. He thought it might be helpful to the other man in evening clothes.

There were two hours on the porch in the summer-night quiet, to the accompaniment of some excellent cigars of Mr. Squem's providing. He had brought them along and insisted that they be tried. "Yours are no good," he jocularly informed the host. Professor Browne made some further effort to display his protégé, but Mr. Squem had noticed that the master of the house was treated as a sort of necessary furniture, and to the astonishment of the other two men actually succeeded in thawing him out and getting him alive. It was a great surprise, and infinitely warming to Professor Browne's brother; and to Miss Cynthia it seemed a kind of beautiful miracle.

She could not remember when she had seen her father's *eyes* light up or heard him laugh, and it made a catch in her throat.

As the evening wore on, she sat down at the piano in the open-doored room and began to play. Mr. Ledgerwood and Professor Browne continued an earnest discussion of some problem connected with Renaissance Art, but Mr. Squem fell silent before the music stealing to the porch from within. It was of a type unfamiliar to him, and he was sure it would not whistle. Under other conditions, it is doubtful if he could have held it music at all; but there was something in it, as things were, which strangely moved him, and there was an effect and a concord within, which, as it was not maimed by any attempted expression, made the spindling spiritual experience of Dudley Ledgerwood show as mockery indeed.

. . . . . .

Mr. Squem sat on the edge of his bed in the twelve-dollar silk pajamas which he had bought expressly for this occasion, and, as he preluded sleep with a cigarette, thought about the stage of the evening and the persons of the play.

"Some swell shack," he soliloquised. "That big hall,—and the kid in the front yard squeezing the mackerel,—such things cost real money. But then, no dress-suits; and that ratty old picture—of all the cold gravy!—That man with the cocoanut whiskers,"—thus he recalled Mr. Ledgerwood,—"he's some sour brother, but then he's sick. That's easy; he's a sick man. Professor Browne is the best ever. Let me do all the talking and hugged the wall; took a back-seat himself. George, *I* got to do more of that! That brother of his, poor duffer! All he needs is somebody to fuss over him and wake him up. Miss

Cynthia!"—he hesitated, unwilling now to apply the complimentary phrase of some hours before. "All to the good," he sighed, and the music that wouldn't whistle was back with him. He surveyed himself at full length in a mirror door. "It isn't there," he said, "not there!" And then again, "All to the good!"

In another part of the house the butler showed a maid the silver dollar, which some way seemed to him more than money—seemed to have properties lacking in money.

"He isn't a gentleman," he said; "of course, not at all a gentleman. But he's all right—all *right!*"

In the drawing-room Miss Cynthia addressed Mr. Ledgerwood. "Oh, I know," she said, "any one would say I was impossible if I were put in a story

—or else that I'm one of the kind who run away with the chauffeur. But I've met a gentleman at last,—I don't care what you say,—a gentleman at last. You remember in *The Flight of the Duchess*—

> So all that the old Dukes had been without knowing it,
> This Duke would fain know that he was, without being it.

I've been thinking of that all the evening. Don't you see,—can't you see, Mr. Ledgerwood,—that we've had something *real* here to-night—that one of the old Dukes has been here?"

And then—

"No one can be a gentleman and feel being so. I've known the kind who feel being so. Mr. Squem doesn't—and he's a gentleman!"

III

A PLAYHOUSE EPISODE: THE SEX INSTINCT

MR. PETER SQUEM had been thoroughly barbered—shaved, massaged, shampooed and anointed with "Roses of Avalon." Also he had had "tonic." Then he had donned his evening clothes—correct in every detail, according to the House of Fashion stylebook—and in a state of extreme fragrance had made his way to a parquet chair costing three dollars at the Lyric Theatre. Wagner opera it was to be. Mr. Squem knew little of this, but he understood it was "classy," and he knew that three dollars meant that one must "come along with the clothes."

He did not achieve rapport with the music, and was unable to differentiate much of it from the preliminary tuning of the instruments. During one of the most impressive numbers, his thoughts were upon the liquid secretions and frequent emptyings of a large horn. "Regular old geyser," he thought. When the first part ended—it seemed quite long—he turned to a gentleman in the chair next his and remarked:

"I guess you have to learn *how* in this kind of business, the same as you do with caviare."

"Well, yes," was the answer, "*learn* or pretend you have. It doesn't appeal to you?"

"It hasn't got my post-office address yet," said Mr. Squem. "Think a correspondence-school would help?"

"Doubtful," replied the other, "though some one was talking the oth-

er day about lion-taming by correspondence. It's 'the music of the future,' you see—that's what they call it—that you are hearing to-night, and that's what has brought seventy per cent of these people here. They don't really hear any more music than you do, and it almost bores them to death—there's considerable suffering around us; but to be among the early arrivals in the future, you know—something a little more than up to date"——

"You mean they don't come for the show," interrupted Mr. Squem, "but only to get in front?"

"Your phrase," said the gentleman, "explains their suffering and immolation. They want exactly that—to get in front, or keep close to people they think in front, and they'll endure a lot for that. Your feeling about Wagner reminds me of a very old story. They say a Chicago pork millionaire once

went to Baireuth and there heard a Wagner opera—of course the thing to do. When they asked him what he thought of it, he said: 'It just proves what I've always said—that a man ought to stick to his job. As long as this man Wagner stuck to making sleeping-cars, he was all right.' "

"Off, wasn't he?" said Mr. Squem quite seriously. "It wasn't the same Wagner at all! You can understand it, though. Do *you* care for him?"

The other smiled. "I am interested in people," he said. "I try to write books about people, and so I have to study them. I find Wagner opera a particularly good place to do that—an excellent place to study a very funny breed."

"Excuse *me*," said Mr. Squem. "The price is too high for the come-back. Three plunks to see a lot of pikers—and sit in a planing-mill to do

it! I've had my dose, and this is an overhead charge for the Mercury Tire Company. I'm going in next door to see Charlie Chaplin."

Mr. Henry Barton Greene, without explaining that Mr. Squem himself was the real magnet, asked if he might go. "I've swung my butter-fly net enough here to-night," he said, "and I'd really like to see some motion-pictures. So if you'll permit me——"

"Sure! Come along," said Mr. Squem. "It'll make you forget this gold-brick. You'll see some folks, too —live ones."

It was drizzling as they left the theatre, and Mr. Squem elevated an umbrella to which he drew his companion's attention. "Imported," he said, "and weighs exactly seventeen ounces." He fondled the ivory handle, carved after the similitude of a female's nether limb. "The firm's Christmas to me," he

added, "and set 'em back twenty-two fifty."

Mr. Chaplin was super-active and inconceivably contortionate. He pushed hand-carts into man-holes and fell in after them. He tripped up policemen and buried them under park benches. He made prodigal use of paste, which he impartially applied to walls and pictures and the features of bystanders. For all of which he had his reward in deafening shouts of merriment and uproarious applause. It was a ravished audience.

"Comic!" gasped Mr. Squem, wiping his streaming eyes with an immense silk handkerchief of startling pattern, "Sure comic! Woof! *These* people come for the show, and they're getting it—getting it now; no 'future' monkey-business; see? They ain't worried about getting in front, either—they're

seeing what's in front. Some Stuff! And all for ten cents! Those *poor* dubs up there at the funeral—and at three dollars per!"

Mr. Chaplin's part of the entertainment drew toward its close, and as he volleyed a large mass of dough into the face of an elderly lady on crutches, Mr. Squem punctuated the crowd's delighted screeches:

"You get the *plot,* don't you see? That's what—the *plot.* There wasn't a smell of one in the Wagner business, —not a snuff. Honest, it was just bughouse. Here's another film—not comic, but I bet it's good—'The Crucifixion of Imogene.' I guess we'd better stay."

The production was a specially obvious form of the triangle. It began in California, amid scenery which impressed the exacting Mr. Greene as marvellous, then moved to an appal-

lingly elaborate hotel—one of the sort described as existing to provide exclusiveness for the masses—in New York, and ended in Switzerland. The husband, a gentleman of cold and haughty bearing and brittle morals, appeared in five carefully cut suits of clothing in as many scenes, waved servants about with imperial gestures and used a desk telephone three times. The wife achieved her whole duty by being saccharinely sweet and by incessantly weeping—curiously without the least disarray of her features. The snaky villainess—there was nothing else to do after the husband's swift and rather puzzling reclaim to glaring impeccability—obligingly fell down the Matterhorn by dummy-proxy at the end. Mr. Greene felt that there was nothing to say, and Mr. Squem that it was impossible to say enough.

"Gee!" he ejaculated, as the pseudo-

body of the temptress, lying under low light at the foot of the mountain, faded into the vision of husband and wife in uncomfortably close embrace, and the crashed-out Mendelssohn's wedding march—"Gee!"

He relieved his surcharged soul.

"What do you say to hot dogs and suds over at Spotty's?" he asked.

At Spotty's he was able to talk about it. "Some great piece," he said. "I bet even the ticket-man bawled. It's got all the preachers scorched for fair, and it's just like it said on the curtain, 'A Lesson for Every Home.' "

He addressed himself to his mug, and went on.

"There's only one thing I'd have changed—or put in. It ended right, all right; but that guy—some snappy dresser, wasn't he?—ought to have got more *jolts*. I liked his wife's forgiving him, and, Great Scott, I'd have him get

wives had best—well—stick to each other, not too much is to be made of it when they don't."

Mr. Squem looked at Mr. Greene very hard.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that any man who isn't a skunk says a thing like that?"

"The word is harsh," replied Mr. Greene. "These people think they see beyond our present small normal arrangements—see into structure, you know. They think we must rise above certain popular notions of ours—really superstitions—in this matter of sex; get over the idea that it is 'holy,' or anything like that, you know, and—well—grant considerable leeway to and make considerable allowance for the sex-instinct."

"Oh, Lulu!" said Mr. Squem. "Do they say that about the swipe-instinct—hogging things, you know? Do they

say that about the gun-instinct—shooting guys in the back, like those Indians in New York? Allowance—Rats! Men I know—men who would spoil the air of a stable—know that that's mush!"

He rose from his chair and straightened. "You know what I think?" he asked. "I think people who say that—well, the best you can say of 'em is that they're smart Alecks, and smart Alecks make you sick. If they're not that, then they're just a bunch of snakes."

"I am a man," he went on, in a voice somewhat changing, "and some spotted; and I'm looking for a whipping-post for some things in my life—looking for it, and by God I'm going to have it! It's coming to me and it's mine. I'm getting some of it right along, too—every day—for something I done fifteen years ago. And it wasn't

the sex-instinct that done it. It was *me!*"

"I am a man," he repeated, "and a man who knows mighty little except rubber, Almighty God knows! But I know better than that thing you said, and—I am a man and not a hound!"

And then he added, very solemnly, a word which, someway seeming at once an anathema and a prayer, testified the massive decency at the heart of the common man:

"To hell with your sex-instinct!"

IV

AN AUTOMOBILE EPISODE: "UP TO THE GOOD MAN"

PETER B. SQUEM, representative of Mercury Tires, was on a trip with his car—an Ariel roadster, blindingly yellow save for the broad purple streak about its body and with red-rimmed wheels. He enjoyed using this vehicle which the Ariel people advertised as "the uttermost expression of modernity," and whose colouring was Mr. Squem's own idea. "I guess it will make the yaps sit up," the sales agent had remarked on delivering the car, and he was right. It made everybody sit up and the more after the purchaser had added a pink top, with the

final happy touch of a portrait of himself looking out of the oval window at the back. "They get me coming and going, you see," said Mr. Squem. Below the portrait was a line or two apropos the merits of Mercury tires.

At the hotel he had persuaded a breakfast-table acquaintance to ride with him to a town some twenty miles distant, instead of waiting an hour for a train; and the gentleman, after a startled look at the car—it occurred to him that a camel would be considerably less conspicuous—had tucked himself in and the two had got underway. The host had an agreeable sense of rhyming with his car. A Sunday paper had shown him illustrations of the very latest in automobile togs, and as a consequence his coat, goggles and cap were all strictly contemporaneous—if not, indeed, a little more.

He had a good deal of pleasure in

"letting her out." It was not enough that the car should be a thing of unique —of almost piercing—beauty. It must be there with the goods. Mr. Squem had received from a "lady friend," at Christmas, a gift of cigars—cigars individually wrapped in silver paper and reposing in a mistletoe-emblemmed box, with "The Season's Greetings" in gold tracery on top. A dainty thing, yet those cigars when lighted—so Mr. Squem imparted to a friend—tasted like something long dead. He was glad now, as always, to demonstrate the Ariel no such proposition. So he "let her rip" and they came, a yellow flash, doing a full mile a minute over the pike and with the culverts through which they passed clashing like cymbals in their ears. And then!—A sudden cave in a summer-road down at the side, a swift whirl of the wheel, and the car desperately ploughing at right angles

off into a field, shaking like a Newfoundland, rearing like a broncho, heavily smashing at last into a stump.

The two sat motionless for five seconds after the jar. Then Mr. Squem said with feeling:

"You want to hump yourself and be damn sure to thank the Lord for this—same as you rap on wood. I always do."

To which curious bidding to prayer his companion, after a moment's pause, unsteadily rejoined:

"A close—close—call. It might have been death."

"Sure, just what I meant," said Mr. Squem, "Thank the Lord and get it over. Some crimp in the car, all right. Look at that radiator. We'll have to hoof it for help."

There were two miles of the hoofing. "I've got a hunch," said Mr. Squem, as they began to step off, "that I don't

sell tires to-day. This siding we're coming to, well, they'll flag something they call a train at about eleven and you can get out; but it's on the cards for me to telephone the Dutch town for some kind of a car-tink and then roost here till he comes. Some pic-nic! You know those community mausoleums? They got the idea for 'em from this burg I'm going to be hung up in."

He paused to light a stogie and then added:

"Thank Pratt, I can do something besides fight flies."

Then, rummaging in the pockets of his billowing automobile coat, he produced, to the considerable surprise of his companion, a copy of *The Contemporary Review*. "A fellow was telling me in Poughkeepsie last week," he said, "that this has some class. It sure ought to have. They want four bones a year for it and it hasn't got

a smell of a picture in it—not a smell."

"I want to take off my hat," said the other, "to your nerve, your wonderful spring back from the shock we've just had. You know I'm all shaken up. It's going to last a long while with me—that awful pitching down the field and the car on the edge of going over. And then that gully—did you see it?—showing just beyond that stump that saved us. We were mighty close to eternity. We were within an ace of death."

"It was up to the Good Man," said Mr. Squem with an air of dismissal, "and we're here."

"But it was death, you know," persisted the other, "death just as close as death comes to the trenches. *That* was what we were against. How can you pass it off as you do?"

"Same as I passed off the smallpox I skipped last year," answered

Mr. Squem, "The time I got into the pest-house at Keokuk by mistake. What's the good of going around and thinking about it? What I'm thinking about is how to get out of this mess.—That's the job, not thinking about death."

"But heavens, man, we've had something to make us think about it. Just *make* us think about it. Lots of people think about it without anything at all to make them and here you are with your nerves as steady as a clock."

"Nothing doing," interrupted Mr. Squem.

"Well, lots do," said the other, apparently glad to talk. "Anyway, don't you have to sometimes, if you think at all? It's only thin, surface living that doesn't sometimes. I remember a poem, whose writer, full of thoughts of his own death, ends two of the verses:

"'I wonder what day of the month,
I wonder what month of the year?'"

Mr. Squem's reception of this was laconic. "Some nut," he said. Then, emitting a yell, he caught the other by the collar and violently dragged him to the middle of the road, pointing in explanation, a second later, to a rattlesnake, in coil and ready to strike, perilously close to the path.

"Good God!" exclaimed the guest. "Can anything more happen to-day?"

Mr. Squem volunteered no opinion on this head, but with deliberation and coolness proceeded to despatch the ugly reptile with stones, after which he evidently considered the incident entirely closed, and remarked:

"I don't know if you're a preacher——."

"Lawyer," said the other, his voice shaking.

"I wasn't going to say anything if

you *was* a preacher—people don't. We got to have men around to believe things the rest of us can't, and then bat 'em out to us, overdose us—see? —with things we ought to believe *some*. Yes, we just call them 'Reverend' and let them talk—it's all tommy rot, thinking about death, and it's the best horse-sense not to ever think about it, at least until it gets here—and then a quick deal. I was to see Mach Leondard before he died last week—it was cancer—and he says to me: 'I've just shook hands with God, and I'm ready when he is.' That's all right—just business, you understand. But until the time sure comes, I figure the job is my business, and nothing else—and the rest is up to the Good Man."

"A new Euthanasia," said the lawyer.

"What's the name of a sleeping car

got to do with it?" queried Mr. Squem.

The guest, whose name was Robinson, very decently insisted upon waiting for Mr. Squem, so they did not flag the train. The two put in the morning smoking and playing cards in the office of the New Aldine Hotel—the most out-at-elbows of all the dingy buildings of the settlement. During the forenoon the entire population, save one sorely disappointed bed-ridden man, filtered in to see the visitors and speculate as to why in the world they were there, one native conjecturing to another that Mr. Squem might perhaps be Mr. Schwab, minded to buy the town. The dinner, when it came, was not exactly an orgy, the ham being quite salt, the potatoes quite hard, the coffee quite indefinite in flavour and the pie quite popular with numerous energetic flies. This last circum-

stance woke an old memory in Mr. Squem.

"Makes you think," he said, "of that guy at the railroad eating-joint. 'What kind of pie?' they says; and *he* says, 'Blackberry.' 'Oh,' they says, 'that ain't blackberry,' and blew on it. And, believe me, it wasn't. It was custard!"

With such table talk and with pleasantries at the expense of the frowzled waitress—Mr. Squem demanding chilled grape-fruit and other such delicacies and making up for her perturbation with a dollar bill at the end—the meal passed and at two a car-tink arrived in a large automobile from the Dutch town. The distance to the invalid Ariel was soon covered, such of the population as could walk footing it in wake of the car—it was not every day that such things happened. The expert went over the roadster and said it

could travel to the hospital on its own wheels and a farmer's team dragged it slowly, and with many a bump, back to the road. Seven dollars was the fee for this service. "Dirt cheap," the farmer had assured Mr. Squem, who, in answer, remarked, "You got everything, every darned thing, but the bristles."

Then the automobile man attached the roadster by chains to his own car and the start was made.

On the journey, pursued at something more than twenty miles an hour, but characterised by Mr. Squem as "Some toad funeral"—Mr. Robinson did some thinking. He was still inwardly rocking from what had happened—the "close-up" to death, of the morning, and the weaving head of a rattle-snake, which insisted on getting into his field of view, had repeatedly made goose-flesh rise upon him through

the day. He was much put out by the collapse of his philosophy before the situation. He remembered—and did not like to remember—a paper on "The Cultivation of Self-Sufficingness" which he had recently read before a group of cool and emancipated spirits like himself—its upshot and burden being that to the soul stripped of superstitious fancies and firmly grasping life, the soul reposing upon itself and its strength, nothing could really happen. He had drawn freely upon Emerson and the Upanishads in the representation of this view which had immensely regaled all the cool and balanced spirits on the premises—elect samples of the poised who had regarded it as a tribute to themselves. And now—it made him sick—he had been shaken and beaten down and pulled about. He had lost balance, and been afraid—was still afraid! It was rough

on the self-sufficingness theory, and especially rough on Eustace Robinson. And it had all been so different with this Mr. Squem, an entirely unreflective, not to say absurd, being, of at most twelve mental years, who had been not the least thrown off balance, not the least afraid: who, using the most primitive materials, seemed somehow to have fashioned a weather-proof cosmos—one that met test by acting and working like a cosmos, and not like a bad umbrella. Of course one might be amused—Mr. Robinson had been considerably amused—by the naïveté of the man and by the architecture of his shanty-town cosmos. "The Good Man!" thought the lawyer. "Ridiculous! The Good Man!" —and smiled. The smile did not stay. Something told Mr. Robinson—suddenly jolting again toward death, suddenly seeing again something hideous-

ly weaving in his path—that Peter Squem was not ridiculous; that what was ridiculous was himself.

It may be that this nettled him.

"I've been thinking," he said as they lurched along, "of what you said this morning about some things being up to the Good Man."

Mr. Squem took a look at the Ariel trailing along behind. "Who the devil would they be up to?" he asked.

"That's just it—just it. Who? That's where the trouble comes in. Some of us think that it's really that that's being of the War"——

"All you got to do," said Mr. Squem cheerfully, "is to use the brains God gave you—and not be a quitter. Speaking of the War——"

"Wait a minute. You know, of course, that there can't be a forty million mile high giant—a big good *man* —running things down here. We can't

think that sort of thing—sheer, childish anthropomorphism—any more."

"I know a nigger barber in Paoli," said Mr. Squem, "who'd give you five dollars—five anyway—for that word! What's the reason you can't think that? The underpinning is sure a man—or something like a man. Everybody says 'He,' don't they?"

Mr. Robinson suddenly reflected that Mr. H. G. Wells was doing just this very thing.

"Sure, it stands to reason," continued Mr. Squem, then, "Ease her up, George, here's a bridge."

"Well, counting that out," said Mr. Robinson, "and letting the man part go, what is there to prove that He's good? Look at the world! (a bright woman said to me not a week ago that a cow could have arranged a better universe than this) think of the horrible snake you killed this morning!"

"*He's* up to the Good Man for fair," said Mr. Squem with something like pity in his voice. "Nobody else can take care of him."

"Do you know," asked Mr. Robinson, "that Flammarion, the astronomer, said, not long ago, that this is a world not much worth fighting for anyway——"

"Quitter!" interrupted Mr. Squem, "Look here, let's get down to brass tacks. I'm not living in a world that hasn't got the best that's in *me*, behind it—see? If that isn't so, everything's bug-house! I'm not letting anything smaller'n *that* get back of things and run the works, understand? I'll ask some gent to kick me—and real hard—when I do, though honest I'd be too punk for anybody to kick. Things don't look good? What does that Flim-flam man know about 'em? I know—come on the road a week with

me, just one little week, and see. A quitter bets the boss is no good—anybody can lay down and squeal—I'm playing up—I've got to, to have any use for myself—either the boss is all right or everything's bug-house, and I'm no quitter, and no fooling with the works for me! Think that and *you're* bug-house. I say he's all right—no, the boss of these works is no bonehead and I put every cent of my pile on the Good Man."

Then the perfectly tragic things happened. A mite of a child—she could not have been more than three—darted through the gate of a yard they were passing and out into the road. She was a winsome thing, dainty and fairylike—Titian's Virgin of the Presentation grown small. Her hair streamed behind her, her white frock fluttered in the breeze she was making,

as she chased a scrap of a kitten. The kitten frolicked toward the centre of the road, and the child, with eyes for nothing else, headed suddenly full on the car. There was no time—no way —only the gleam of a tiny white object in front and then a quiver of the heavy machine. In another moment three horror-stricken men leaped from their seats, and, a few feet behind, Peter Squem gathered in his arms a most lovely but no longer living thing. "Poor Lambie," he said, with his face torn into depths whose wonder the lawyer felt in the thick of the horror. "Poor Lambie!"

"Some one must take her in there," said Robinson, pointing to the house behind the trees, "take her in and *tell* them. God knows I can't—I can't!"

"I never could," said the driver shaking like an aspen, "I've got one her age. I'd die."

Peter Squem bore the little burden through the gate and up the path. He did not knock at the door, but turned the knob and entered. A sweet-faced woman came down the hall.

"I've got the baby," he said. "She ran into the car. I wish it had been me—but it was her. You've got to take on, and you're going to ache to die—for a long—long time—just ache to die. But you want to remember" —and the reeling mother looking into his eyes had the feel of arms beneath her in an overwhelming flood—"you want to remember that it's going to be all right somehow—all right someway. It's up to the Good Man."

SOME MALE TRIANGLES

V

MR. THORNTON

THE REV. MR. BOWLES THE DRIVER

THE man with the string tie looked —and was—precisely the sort of person to call a book "meaty," and he was riding in the back seat of the country carriage with a man likely to call a book "inept." Which means that neither could possibly understand the other.

It was the burying of Alexander Moffatt, who at Selby's Corners had for years been joining house to house and field to field, and now desisted from that intense and silent job. For Alexander's neighbours the future life was something mixed with musical in-

struments and pervaded by æsthetic joys. Alexander did not in the least fit into that—would not, as the postmaster had once remarked in another connection, "corroborate" with that. He had left—or relinquished—his farms, and, when severed from them, utterly dissolved.

The man with the string tie—minister of the Baptist Church at Selby's Corners—had "preached the funeral." The difficulty of the situation had been considerable, and the dead Alexander's face, with its bull-dog expression and perfectly straight-across mouth, had not helped. Therefore, the minister had been noisy and emphatic beyond his wont. He had heavily ground in the austere fact of mortality, and at the end had made the most of "not slothful in business," and the circumstance that Alexander had been a good provider. After this a quartette with

a terribly projecting alto had sung "One Sweet Day."

The other man was Alexander's nephew by marriage, representing a niece by blood who was sick and unable to come. He was a city lawyer, and looked the part in garments, face and carriage. His wife had long since sloughed all the characteristics of the Moffatt *stirps*. Such things are always happening in America.

The sepulture of Alexander had impressed the proxy mourner as a fascinating clinic in folk-lore. At the house he had dimly recalled something of Kipling's about pagan rites and American middle-class burials, and something else of Spencer's about the need of a professional religious class to keep alive the sense of mystery in the breed. At the grave the service had been in charge of the Independent Order of Bisons. Their ritual had

been stickily sentimental, and their chaplain had made more than one impressive reference to "the diseased." Then they had, man by man, deposited small white cloth cut-outs of buffaloes in the grave, and withdrawn.

"Just like the South Sea Islands!" thought Alexander's nephew. "These people know about telephones and all that; but after all, it's about the same."

Now, on the way back from the cemetery, the two ill-assorted passengers had nothing to say to each other. The gulf between them so asserted itself as to discourage even talk about the weather. The driver turned conversational and came to the rescue.

"Well, Reverend Bowles," he observed, "Alick's gone to his reward, all right."

The minister squirmed.

"Most too good to damn, an' yet hardly good enough to save. He give thirty dollars toward the new hose-cart an' helped on the uniforms for the silver cornet band. *You* know how he laid 'em all out at the big festival you had for foreign missions. An' yet, if he was after a farm, my, how anybody got stepped on that come in his way—widows or orphans or anybody! It's going to be some job for the Almighty to sift things out with Alexander."

"Why should you think any Almighty must sift things out?" inquired the nephew by marriage.

The Reverend Mr. Bowles, delighted to have Alexander pushed into the background, and not displeased by a promising scent of battle, instantly unlimbered.

"The Word," he answered in a tone

pugnaciously pious, "the Word. Romans fourteen and ten says we shall stand before the judgment seat, and Second Corinthians five and ten says the same and more, too; and Hebrews nine and twenty-seven tells how 'it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.' Then there's John's Revelation, which says right out, 'The books shall be opened'—books, understand. See, too, Matthew twenty-five, thirty-one to end."

Mr. Bowles felt it a happy circumstance that he had preached on this subject at Conference only the week before.

The driver was a happy man. At his livery and feed establishment he had heard that "the new Reverend," lately come to the Corners, was mighty in the Scriptures, and that he owned above three hundred books. Would he put it all over this city chap?

"I see," said the lawyer pleasantly. "You get this out of certain old writings which are authority for you. Millions of other people, in blocks of varying sizes, get something quite different out of other old writings which are authority for them. Millions more of us get something still more different out of no writings at all. Are you entirely sure that all these millions are wrong, and that you alone and those with you have—excuse me—picked out the ace?"

Mr. Bowles had never preached about anything like this, and did not readily find a text. He came back, however, after a pause, with words averring that spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.

"I see," said the lawyer again. "You *have* picked out the ace. And when any one has done that, there's

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nothing more to say. Do you mind if I light a cigar?"

Mr. Bowles did mind, but did not say so; and he did not understand why, with his shots so well aimed and so vigorously sped, he did not feel more comfortable.

"Look here," he began, "Mr.— ah" —"Thornton."

"Mr. Thornton, this blessed book," —he held up his Bible—"written with the finger of God and declaring the whole counsel of God, says we shall all stand before the judgment seat and all give account. It tells of a worm that dieth not and of the wrath of the Lamb. It——"

"Oh, yes, I know," interrupted the lawyer. "It tells of a great many things like that, and what it says about them *may* take hold—doubtful, though —of three-tenths of the present population of this country. You belong to

the three-tenths. The other seven-tenths of us quietly go our own ways, leaving you happy with the ace—which for us is really the two-spot. In this matter of the after-death"—he blew a column of smoke in the air—"the seven-tenths of us just don't know anything about it—*any*thing. We know we're here, and that's all. Even with the three-tenths, or a good many of them, you'd find, if you were to peel of the wrappings, that all they really know and are sure of is that they're here. They wouldn't bet or stake their lives on anything more. Put them up against a crisis and see. Of course there are a few people, like Oliver Lodge, who think they've broken through into something, but——"

"Who," heatedly demanded Mr. Bowles, finding his voice at last, "who is Senator Lodge compared with the Apostle Paul?"

"The Apostle Paul remains faintly part of 'the current prejudice,' as John Morley once called it. He talks about judgment seats and somebody to stand before them after dying, and we respectfully let him talk, just as we respectfully go to funerals and respectfully listen to impossible things. You three-tenths have the only opinion that is *organised*—there it is—but the real general *conviction* is miles and miles away from it. The bed-rock is, that we know we're here. When it comes to the scratch, that is all that the seven-tenths of us—yes, and more—will bet on or stake our lives on. Put almost anybody against a crisis and see."

The driver stopped his horses at the Empire Hotel, and left his passengers at that hostelry. Mr. Thornton, making ready for supper, repeated, "We're here, and that's all."

Mr. Bowles felt that he had been in conversation with a damned soul.

Down at the stable the driver made report to certain interested friends: "The new Reverend is certainly hell on the Bible. What sent him to the ropes was the lawyer's gittin' him off the track—away from the subject. Their way, you know."

The Empire Hotel burned that night, making for Selby's Corners what the setting up of Angelo's David made for Florence—a new date from which to reckon time. The lawyer and the minister, who perforce had stayed over night, since the railroad's one daily train would not leave until morning, were the only persons sleeping on the third floor. Awakened by the yells of the entire population, they threw open their room doors, only to recoil before thick clouds of choking smoke. Thorn-

ton crept on hands and knees down the narrow hall to a window. Leaning out to breathe, he felt presently beside him another man—the minister—who in utter panic began to babble incoherent prayers.

"O God!" he shrieked, "remember thine ancient mercies! Remember I'm in the ministry—a family, too, O God, you know that! I can't die—just can't die and go away from all I know to what I don't know! I've got work to do here—your work! Get me out of this, God—quick!"

"Quiet, man!" said Thornton. "You want your head."

"The stairs are gone," wailed on the minister, "and we're thirty foot from the ground! There's fire belchin' out from the window under us, too! To die!"—the wail passed into an appalling screech—"To die, die, die!

Where are you—are you anywhere, God?"

The ends of a ladder pushed up through the smoke to the window-ledge. A roar of voices came from the crowd below, and one above all others: "Quick, before it burns! Quick, for God's sake, quick!"

"On to it, you!" said Thornton to the collapsing Bowles. "You have children and I haven't. Hurry!"

Bowles swung over the ledge, still babbling. He began to make his way down. Little flames were licking at the ladder's sides and rungs. Five feet below, he looked back at the window, and, as the craven self for a moment cleared out of his features, saw Thornton's face, with a look on it he never forgot—a look to last any man's life. He knew only that it was big—too big for him to understand.

"But you'll die," he screamed as he descended. "I'm to live, but you'll—die!"

"No!" called back Thornton, above the crackle and through the smoke. "I'm up against it and I've changed my mind! I know I'm here, and more than here—more! I shall not die!"

And the building fell in with a crash as Bowles stood safe on the ground.

VI

MR. SMILEY

MR. HUNTER MR. BRADLEY

IN every small town there is one business man who wears a silk hat. He is born to it; it is part of the Great Order, and nobody jeers. Mr. Hunter was that man in Parkerton.

He happened one night into Smiley's drug-store, and while the proprietor was putting up his prescription companionably made talk.

"Potatoes are still going up," he observed. "How people are going to get on, I don't see. Did you hear about that fire up near Harrisburg—farmer's barn with eight hundred bushels of potatoes, I think it was? He was

holding them for a higher price—even when they were out of sight. I think the Lord had a hand in that fire."

"You could hardly say that, could you?" inquired a gentleman sitting by the stove.

"Why not, Mr. Bradley? He can do what He wants, can't He? And if sparrows don't fall without His noticing, I guess this kind of piggishness gets his attention."

"Yes," said Mr. Bradley, "but you don't think God set that barn on fire, do you?"

"He permitted it to burn," answered Mr. Hunter, burnishing his hat; "He permitted it to burn."

"Yes, and might have permitted it if the farmer had been selling the potatoes at one-fourth the market, or planning to give them to the Children's Home."

"But it wasn't that way," said Mr. Hunter.

Mr. Smiley, having wrapped the prescription with much deftness and rung fifty cents on his cash-register, entered the conversation.

"I saw a picture the other day," he said, "of two Testaments which had saved soldiers' lives in the trenches. A bullet was sticking half-way through one of them, and the other one was pretty nearly torn to flinders. What do you think of that?"

"That they happened to be in the way," said Mr. Bradley. "One of those 'Ford Jokes' books or an almanac would have done the same thing."

"Well, do you think God has anything to do with anything?" inquired Mr. Hunter testily. "I'm glad of the chance to ask you, for I know you never go to church, and I saw a book you had ordered down at Brown's yes-

terday—*Creative Evolution,* by Bergman or something like that—and I heard you criticise the President for appointing a day of prayer for peace. *Do* you think God has anything to do with anything?"

"I think," said Mr. Bradley, "that God has everything to do with everything, and I think that God is much too big for such little mites as we to talk about or think about."

Mr. Smiley's drug-store had been the scene of many an argument and discussion — controllingly political. Frequently had the very substantial blunders of the President been pointed out by sundry gentlemen, and his signal sagacities by others, the interested proprietor listening or participating, the while he took care of trade or constructed Smiley's Infallible Troches. Debate was at times punctuated by small talk, for the disputants had a

genuine interest in their kind, particularly such of it as dwelt in the neighbourhood, and the assemblage had once been described as "the sewing circle," by a female person who lived opposite. From which it may be inferred that Smiley's was quite a human sort of place. It had not gone in much for the gods, however.

"You see," went on Mr. Bradley, "you people who seem most interested in God—not that you really are—you 'herded and branded' religious people, as somebody calls you, have God mixed up with such little things, and you keep Him pottering with such little things—and that just kills God for the rest of us."

Mr. Hunter was acutely conscious of two facts—that of being under fire and that of his eldership in the Presbyterian Church.

"Having the understanding darken-

ed," he began solemnly—and his hat seemed like a mitre—"having the understanding darkened——"

"Not on your life!" interrupted Mr. Bradley with emphasis. "It's exactly the other thing. It's having the understanding broadened and enlightened that makes just about seventy-five of every hundred men in the average American town let you religious people go your own way. It's your not having *enough* God for them to believe in, that's the trouble. It's that you *will* keep God fussing with little things."

Mr. Smiley got a tube of dentifrice for a customer with ill-dissembled haste. He did not wish to lose a word. Just as Mr. Hunter was about to reply, there was a fumbling at the door, which finally opened, and admitted the local dipsomaniac, Mr. Rook Bevan, picturesquely drunk. Dilapidated, un-

steady, yet urbane, he made a sweeping bow.

"Doc," he said, "I am a ree-novated man—all ree-novated up—and as a ree-novated man I come in here to get you to go along to Elder Squigg's tent and get ree-novated like I done last night. The Elder says for me to do this and get you saved—ree-novated, understand—like me."

"Now, if you can resist that, Smiley!" put in Mr. Bradley.

The wandering eye of Mr. Bevan rested on the lawyer.

"Ree-novated," he murmured, "that's it. We want everybody ree-novated; every damn—I mean every single—man in town ree-novated. Only"—a maudlin pathos stole into his tone—"everybody can't *git* ree-novated. *You* can't"—here a finger shot out at Mr. Bradley—"for you ain't got any more religion than one

of them bull-fightin' cuspidors. You *can*"—the finger veered to Mr. Hunter—"for no man can wear that plug hat and not be called."

He made his way uncertainly to the show-case behind which Mr. Smiley was standing.

"I want alcohol," he said, with something of a child's pleading in his voice; "please, doc, I want alcohol."

The show-case was a low, all-glass affair, with sundry shelves, also of glass, and laden with numerous small articles, suspended within. When Mr. Rook Bevan tripped and fell on and into this case, the ensuing crash was brilliant. Two-thirds of his body was down among pomades, shattered vials, and tooth-brushes, while his legs gesticulated wildly above. The effect was striking and brief. He was dragged forth almost instantly, and Mr. Smiley, wiping "Maiden Blush" and other cos-

metics from the luckless features, affixed court-plaster to certain ugly cuts.

"Shall I telephone for the marshal?" asked Mr. Hunter.

"Oh, no," said Mr. Smiley; "poor devil, he sort of looks to me to jolly him along and see to him—and it sort of seems up to me to do it. Wait a jiff till I give him something quieting and get him to bed. He's got a cubby in the building next door."

Mr. Bevan, with his countenance pleasantly diversified by the bits of court-plaster and supported by the arm of Mr. Smiley, beamed amiably as he withdrew.

"Of course," he said, "everybody can't *git* ree-novated."

Mr. Smiley, returning ten minutes later, surveyed the ruin which had been a show-case a bit ruefully.

"It'll set me a plumb hundred," he

said, "and I do need the hundred. Well, I'll put it down with the twenty-five I dug up to get him the Keeley. If I need, gee, how he needs!—Let's get our minds off of this. When Rook broke in, you was saying something about God's fussing with little things, Mr. Bradley, and I think Mr. Hunter was getting ready to come back."

Mr. Hunter had been getting ready, and had utilised certain moments of Mr. Bevan's stay in the process. He had not been for years teacher of a men's Bible class for nothing, and now, with his batteries well placed, he proceeded to a conventional and very well executed declaration of the whole counsel of God, as deduced and held by religionists of his kind. It began with the Garden of Eden, abounded in covenants and decrees, and was everywhere stiffened with texts—a miraculous number of them, it seemed to Mr.

Smiley, who was much impressed. Mr. Hunter fancied comfortably that the scale had been big enough.

"The whole human race," he said, "figures in this mighty drama—the whole human race!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said Mr. Bradley; "what's the use? Don't you see that you make God ridiculously small when you keep Him eternally nosing round among such small fry as the human race? Don't you see that that's the trouble? People nowadays don't believe that God does anything of that kind. 'The Lord Talketh Familiarly with Moses'—that's a chapter-head in the Bible. I don't believe He did. Neither do folks in general. They feel just as Carlyle did when he said that it was as sure as shooting that such things never happened. They feel as a late English prime minister did when he said that such conceptions

stifled him. It's all like painting God with whiskers, as the Old Masters used to do."

A small boy of four in an Oliver Twist suit came into the store and demanded a stick of licorice, which Mr. Smiley provided, with the adjuration, "Skip."

The conversation was not resumed. Mr. Hunter seemed stalled and Mr. Bradley hopeless. Then said Mr. Smiley—

"Now you know I'm just an ordinary man. You, Mr. Bradley, are a lawyer, and you read a lot of books, too, everybody says. A man told me the other day he'd bet you've read a thousand books. And you, Mr. Hunter, are a great Bible scholar, if you *are* in the dry-goods line—and you've been to the Holy Land. I'm not in the same class with either of you. You know that weepy-lookin' dog of Alick Mc-

Cue's? Some one asked Alick what breed he was, and Alick says, 'Oh, no particular breed—just dog.' That's me. But just as a plain proposition and as it hits a plain man in the drug business, Mr. Bradley's God seems to be too busy with everything to attend to any particular thing, and Mr. Hunter's God too busy with particular things to attend to everything. Honest, that's about the way it seems to me."

There was an interlude while a soda-water patron was served. Then Mr. Smiley continued,—

"About God, you know, I get my idea from Samuel."

"Ah, the prophet?" asked Mr. Hunter with the pleased expression of one expecting reinforcement.

"Goodness, no," said Mr. Smiley. "The rat who was here for licorice—*my* Samuel. You see, he plays a lot

with his choo-choos and things about the house, all alone. Sometimes a half day'll go without his seeing his mother —she'll be at work in the kitchen or somewhere, and he in another part of the house. Doesn't seem to miss her. Doesn't seem to know he *has* a mother. But don't you make any mistake. He can forget her only because he knows she's there. He can get all wrapped up in his choo-choos and things, only because he's got a sure feel of her being there. If it once came to him that she *wasn't* there—well, I wouldn't like to have it happen, for he'd cry his heart out. He pretty nearly did it once, too, when he wanted something of her and she'd slipped out for five minutes.

"Well, I says to myself, noticing this about Samuel, isn't it a good deal the same about people and God? They forget Him, but they know He's there; and they couldn't wrap themselves all

up in their jobs and things, and go on having a fairly good time, if they didn't know—or feel—that He *was* there. Of course, they don't know what He's doing—Samuel could never guess what his mother was doing in the kitchen—and if they did, they couldn't understand it, any more than Samuel understands a lot his mother does. They just know—or feel—that He's in the house. Just in the house. That's the way it is with me, and a lot of other plain men like me, I do believe."

A month after this conversation at Smiley's the country went to war. There was enlisting and recruiting, and three self-forgetting men—the three who had met at the drug-store—put themselves at the Nation's service, and were accepted and ordered with their company to a mobilisation camp. They might, so rumour said, be

sent to France to fight in the trenches, and with this possibility before them they said good-bye to their friends, amid the waving of flags and blaring of bands, at the train.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Hunter to the young men of his Bible Class who had escorted him to the station. "Remember me when you pray. I don't mean, ask God to do particular things for me, for God has everything to do with everything, and this that we're going in for may reach beyond humanity and beyond this planet. Only think of me when you think of God—remember me when you pray."

"Good-bye," said Br. Bradley, grasping the hand of his law-partner and closest friend. "It has been a tug to do this, but I have orders—*orders,* Frank! Do you know"—he was clearly agitated—"I have almost the sense of a hand on my shoulder—almost the

sense of a voice talking familiarly in my ear?"

"Good-bye," said Mr. Smiley to the small Samuel. "I don't know how I'm going to stand for it, old chum, I sure don't. I just couldn't go if it wasn't for one thing: we're going to make 'em stop taking their daddies away from little tads like you."

And the collar of the Oliver Twist suit was moist, as he pressed its wearer close to his heart.

VII

JUDGE ARBUTHNOT

MR. JONES DR. KENNEDY

TIE the heart of a bat with a red silken string to the right arm, and you will win every game at cards you play.' "

"If you please!" said the man sitting opposite. "In the language of the natives, what-fer book is that, Judge?"

The third man at the Club dining-table smiled. "I've a fancy I know," he said. "Isn't it 'The Long Lost Friend?' "

"None other," replied the Judge, and read the title-page of the thin little black-bound volume: " 'The Long

first published many years ago when people were less enlightened, but please notice that this copy was printed not so long back. I gravely fear that many are committed to these monstrous superstitions. Certainly this is depressing. I can not share your levity over the book."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Jones easily. "That sort of thing doesn't hurt people much. They aren't any less honest or useful for having a few superstitions. Take that darkey who just brought you your check. He's none the worse for the rabbit's foot in his pocket—and more interesting for it; I don't know but more human for it. Mighty good people do some of those 'Long Lost Friend' things—kick about passing under ladders, for instance, or carry dried lemon-peel in their pockets, or something like that. We all have to eat our peck of dirt,

and perhaps we need it, as birds do gravel."

"Speaking of lemon-peel," said the Doctor, "you remember Emerson's owning up that he once carried a horse-chestnut—or was it a potato?—about with him against rheumatism. Very efficacious, he said, as he never had it afterward, and he thought it must have worked backward, as he had never had it before."

"Yes, and old Dr. Samuel Johnson," said Mr. Jones. "Didn't he have a full cargo of superstitions—always entering a room with the right foot in advance, you know, and touching every rung of a balustrade, and so on and so on? Those things never hurt him, and they make him a lot more picturesque."

The three puffed at their cigars for an interval.

"I try to see your side of it," Judge

Arbuthnot observed, "but I wonder if you get below the surface. I wonder if you remember voodooism or recall witchcraft, or realise the dreadful things for which superstition has been responsible in the past. Truly, I feel something like nausea as I look at this horrible little book. To think that people are to-day fooling with such things —things that belong to jungle life and jungle ways!"

"I wouldn't take it so hard, Judge," said Dr. Kennedy. "These things mean only a kind of good-natured betting on the inconceivable possibilities of the universe—and enough of those have been revealed to justify betting on 'most anything. People in general have left 'The Long Lost Friend' a long way behind by this, and their little irrationalities here and there are only proofs of their living wonder at the universe and their consequent alive-

ness in it. I wouldn't worry over the discovery of such a survival."

"Little symptoms often mean serious things," replied the Judge. "The one hope for our advance lies in what Huxley called 'veracity of thought.' I am disturbed by finding in print today such a foe to that as is this book —yes, genuinely disturbed and depressed."

Mr. Jones borrowed "The Long Lost Friend," and the three men separated.

Judge Arbuthnot was to take an early morning train on the following day. He was driven in his car to the station, and saw on the platform there three bodies awaiting a train.

"Are those corpses all to go on the six-fifty?" he asked of the baggage-agent.

"Yes, Judge Arbuthnot, all three."

"Henry," said the Judge to his chauffeur, "I can not go until to-night, after all. Drive home."

He went that night. As the train started, there entered his Pullman a friend who congratulated him upon his fine physical form.

"It's good that Grippe hasn't caught you, Judge," he said, "it's landed on nearly everybody."

"Safe so far," Judge Arbuthnot replied—and rapped with his fingers upon the wooden arm of the car seat.

Behind the curtains of his berth the Judge found a clothes-hanger, and having achieved the acrobatics of undressing disposed his garments upon the same and sank to sleep. The white-jacketed porter, coming along an hour later, stopped at Section Seven.

"If we wasn't honest," he said,

stooping over, "these ca'leless passengers surely would get their jolts."

And he picked up what had slid from Judge Arbuthnot's pocket—four silver coins, a knife and some bits of dried lemon-peel.

VIII

THE REVEREND AMBROSE HORTON
MR. THORPE THE BRAKEMAN

THE Reverend Ambrose Horton had always maintained the complete moral right of a clergyman to smoke. So it peculiarly exasperated him that he should feel uncomfortable while wearing a clerical suit in a smoking car. This, and not draughts, was at the bottom of his retaining his overcoat on the rather mild morning he was riding from Baltimore to Washington. He felt it dissembled his rabat.

"I guess," said his seat-mate, dispelling this impression, "I probably belong to your Church—or did, before

I married a Methodist. You're an Episcopalian, aren't you?"

Mr. Horton bowed.

"Well, I *was* one, but I've gone with her, since we were married eight years ago. It sort of seemed right—she was all wrapped up in her Church. So I've gone with her. That is, sometimes."

"Not regularly?"

"N-no; only once in a while. But I kind of thought I ought to give up, you know—go with her when I do go. That's mostly in the winter. Except then I generally golf Sundays."

"May I ask where you live?" enquired Mr. Horton.

"Certainly—Cincinnati. I sell hardware out of that town—my name is Thorpe—and have been doing it ever since I was twenty-one, fourteen years ago. On the road all the time except Sundays, and those days a caddy-bag looks good to little Willie."

Mr. Horton politely declined a cigar and refilled his pipe.

"You interest me," he said. "I live in a Pennsylvania city of the third class—a rather enterprising and progressive town within easy reach of the great centres. If you sell goods there—and I imagine you do—you know it's alive. Well, anything like general Sunday golf is unknown there—wouldn't go there. A few venturesome individuals at most go in for it. In general, it would be looked at—well, obliquely."

Mr. Thorpe's reception of this was laconic—expressed in the brief vocable "Woof!"

"That sort of thing is viewed as the Sunday theatre is viewed," went on Mr. Horton. "I believe you have that also in Cincinnati?"

"Sure," said Mr. Thorpe.

"I think that in a majority of East-

ern towns such as mine Sunday golf and Sunday theatres go together—and *don't* go. The community-sense holds both to be a moral let-down. As you go West, it doesn't seem to do that."

"I think," said Mr. Thorpe, "that you ought to wake up and hear the birdies sing. The idea of anybody's getting the dog-eye because he plays golf on Sunday! And where is there any harm in seeing a good play on Sunday night? I would do it if I wanted to, but golf is about all I care for—except an occasional horse-race. I certainly do love to see the ponies run."

"I can understand that," replied Mr. Horton, "and I don't see why you shouldn't. The racing itself has really nothing to do with the betting and so on which makes the prejudice against it."

"Sure," said Mr. Thorpe again. "That's what queers it, and you ought to be careful. I do once in a while put a dollar or so on a horse—never more than two—just to add to the interest; and, say, one afternoon—what do you suppose?—I put out two dollars to start and came away with three hundred and eighty-one! Honest! My wife never liked that part of it, someway, but I stopped on the road home and picked up a pair of dandy portières she'd had her eye on, and she didn't say so much."

The clergyman sighed.

"Ethics are an awful mess nowadays," he said. "The Puritans had an easy time: just two bins, and no possibility of making mistakes. We have fifty bins and make a lot of them. I do not adjust to the modern situation and I get severely jolted. Here is the woman who smokes—she is every-

where with her cigarettes, and more everywhere every day. Not the reckless, but the really nice type, you understand; not the 'smart,' but the superior woman. For people of the old regime——"

Mr. Thorpe, who had grown very grave, interrupted.

"That," he said, "is the limit. That is darn near horrible. I've heard how much you do of that in the East, and I want to say that *such* things——"

"Washington!" bawled the brakeman, and stopping by the two gentlemen said:

"You never can tell, can you? That skirt I helped off at the last station you'd a said was a perfect lady—but you never can tell. 'Careful,' she says as I helped her down, 'careful, I've had an accident to my leg.' Leg, gee-whiz!"

IX

THE REVEREND JUSTIN HUNT
DOCTOR HENDERSON MR. BLOGGS

THE Reverend Justin Hunt stood beside his wife's bed at 3:15 A. M.

"There's a strange, blind thing," he said, "roaming about this house. It came upstairs ahead of me just now and went into the study. I'm not afraid of it, but"—his language was as unclerical as the bath-robe he was wearing—"I'd like to know what the devil it is."

The non-neurotic lady in the bed had waked at the creaking of the stairs and had called her husband's name, with this sequel.

"Mercy, Justin!" she said, "what *do* you mean? Get yourself together —come, be sane."

"I am together, all right," he answered. "I fell awake a couple of hours back—maybe it was the spaghetti, I don't know—and went to mulling over Sir Oliver Lodge's book, 'Raymond,' in the sitting-room. Wait, I wasn't reading the seance part at all, but the mighty good stuff at the end, the 'Life and Death'—I think it ought to be all of the book, and the rest chucked—and then——"

"Well?"

"Well, then this strange, blind thing began to get into the game—began to grow up around me. I just wasn't alone—felt in my bones I wasn't along. I picked up *Life,* and read Mr. Martin's editorials—well, it was *there.* Then I went and brewed some coffee, and it was *there*—in the kitchen. I'm

not an ass, Marie, and I don't see things at night—you know that."

"Did you *see* this?"

"Certainly not; more, and a lot more. Felt it—felt it in my bones, as I said, and to my boots. Heavens, the feel of it! It was with me all the way upstairs—up to the time you spoke, and then it seemed to crack and go through the study door."

"Well, I'm not going to divorce you," said the lady, "but we're *not* going to have any more spaghetti at night. Why do you call it blind?"

"I give you my word I don't know," said the Reverend Justin. "I just have to. See here, Marie, you must know I'm pretty well wrenched, or I'd never tell you this. Don't chaff—in God's name, don't chaff! I've just met—and I don't care whether it's outer or inner—something horribly uncanny, something outside of life which

oughtn't to get at life—which beats life down if it does. I'm *not* afraid of it—only horrified—and I'll prove it!"

He was gone from the bedside, and in thirty seconds there was a heavy fall on the floor of the study.

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His physician allowed him to leave his bed in ten days, giving a six-syllabled name to what had brought him there, and then, uttering the single word "Rest," withdrew. A devoted congregation provided for the rest, the clergyman kissed the non-neurotic lady good-bye, and exactly two weeks from the night of his collapse arrived in St. Augustine. He sat that evening, declericalized and with a distinct sense of freedom, in a wonderful hotel, watching the brilliant parade of laces and diamonds, and noting the dog-like convoy of heavy beeves in evening clothes who paid the bills. The man in

the chair at his left spoke startlingly to his thought.

"Chewing-gum dukes and breakfast-food barons," he said. "Rings in their noses, poor devils. They do feed, though. Look at their paunches."

"Not much soul, certainly," replied the Reverend Justin.

"Pardon me," said the man in the chair on the right, cutting in, "you have to use words, of course, but I wouldn't use that word. It isn't 'soul' that's lacking—it's just that these chaps aren't really live animals. I suppose that is what you mean. 'Soul' is just re-acting to something more than cocktails and bills-of-fare,—being a *live* animal. Hold it to that, and you're all right, but you have to look out not to tangle it up with—oh, well, things above living and superstitious things."

"If you *don't* tangle it up with

things above living——" began the clergyman.

"Then you are safe from such melancholy moonshine as has come recently from Sir Oliver Lodge. *Have* you seen his last book? And what do you think of a mind like his condescending to tipping tables and mediums and all the rest of it?"

The mention seemed to block reply with the Reverend Justin. The man at the left who had been industriously smoking pointed across the lobby.

"You see that little shrimp over there by the cigar-stand?" he enquired. "Well, I've seen him around here, looking kind of lost and lonely and generally half-baked, for two or three days. Yesterday I made up to him—looked as if he needed it—but didn't get any come-back. Acted brain-scared. Somebody says to me afterward, 'Heavens, he's a first family of

Philadelphia!' Seemed to think I ought to cash up to somebody for the privilege of speaking to him. Funny, wasn't it?"

"I wonder," he went on after an interval, "if you gentlemen would feel like taking a ride in the morning. A coon who drives one of these two-seated carriages you see everywhere was telling me about the 'Ponce de Leon Spring. He says old Ponce de Leon is buried out there and that folks ought to see it. Of course it would cost a lot less for three than for one. What do you say?"

Mr. Hunt and the man on the right said yes, and the three gave each other their respective names. He on the left proclaimed himself Mr. Simon Bloggs, and readily added that he was a county sheriff from Michigan, making his first visit to the East. The gentleman who objected to 'soul' produced cards read-

ing, "Ernest Douglas Henderson, M.D." Mr. Hunt, uttering the monosyllable which labelled him, added no more.

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A horse supernaturally thin in harness astonishingly smart dragged the party toward the Spring next day, and the very black driver interspersed observations to his beast—addressed as "George"—with comments on objects along the road.

"You see 'at house, gen'lemen?" he asked, pointing to a forlorn shack. "Some murder theah, a couple yeahs ago. Woman cut off huh husband's haid with an axe in the night—clean, plumb off. He's been hantin' the house eveh since—screechin' and carryin' on ev'y night. Nobody won't go nigh it afteh dark—it's broke up the prayeh-meetin' up heah at Shiloh Chu'ch, for the membehs won't pass

the place. Wash Simmons, forgittin', come by one night about ten—and heah was that man standin' by the gate, holdin' his haid straight out in front of him in bofe hands, and the mouth a-yellin'. Wash ain't speshually swift—not as a reg'lar rule—but he sho'ly got some speed on *that* night."

"This, you see," said Dr. Henderson, addressing Mr. Hunt, "is the kind of thing I meant when I spoke of 'soul' last night. It's the——"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Mr. Bloggs, glaring back at the haunted hut, "look at that face at the window!"

They had scarcely turned to see, when George answered a tremendous cut by violently bolting forward. All held tight to the carriage, which lurched and swayed at high speed for a matter of two-hundred yards. Then it came to a stop.

"How we goin' to git back is what I want to know," said the driver with his teeth chattering. "You don't tell me that hant has taken to *day*-time! I ain't no ways anxious to go by theah. But how we goin' to git back?"

"Cut around through a field if you want to," said Mr. Bloggs. "We'll drive George back there and hitch him, and then go through that house. I'm not so darn sure what *is* in there—I sure never saw such a map as the one that grinned out of that window, no, never!—but I'm for going through that house."

"I may as well say that I've poor nerves," said Mr. Hunt. "That is really why I'm down here. Of course, it's all physical, but I believe I'll walk around with the driver."

"All right," Mr. Bloggs replied. "That's good sense. You do that, and leave the house to me and the Doctor."

They found absolutely nothing, though they searched every nook and corner of the wretched cabin. There was the feel that nothing living had been there for months. After ten minutes they walked toward the road. "I'd like to know," said the Doctor, "if a darkey who had never heard of the murder would notice anything unusual here at midnight. One of them started the tale and screech owls or something like them did the rest. As for the face at the window—I didn't see it, for I was holding on for my life —that was likely due to the fall of the sunlight on waves in the glass. That sort of thing, you know——"

"Lord!" broke in Mr. Bloggs, "look at the horse!"

They had come within thirty feet of George, and beheld him settled back and straining at his halter in evident terror. His eyes glared at something

apparently ahead. He drew long, shuddering breaths.

"Sick," said the Doctor.

"Scared," said Mr. Bloggs, "scared at something, and scared blue."

They untied the trembling animal and led him down the road, where, an eighth of a mile distant, they found Mr. Hunt and a very silent negro. The wealth of the Indies could not have tempted the latter again to pass the house. So they returned to the hotel.

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That night their chairs were again together, and the talk went to what had happened in the morning.

"Of course it was ridiculous," the Doctor said, "our searching that shanty. I did feel an ass."

"I really can't see," the clergyman said, "why you should. Anything that strikes ignorant people as mysterious and crawly—anything ill-un-

derstood—ought, I think, to be looked into to *get* it understood. Haunted houses are a persistent proposition,—the crowd has been afraid of them for hundreds of years, and you remember Huxley's saying that the ghosts are older than the gods. Whatever there is back ought to be dragged out. Why shouldn't you look?"

"Answering that," replied Dr. Henderson, "because to look is to take seriously old and pestilent superstitions —things of a lower level—which ought to be left to die and helped to die. To look at such things is like taking off your clothes and putting on a breechclout."

"I give you up," said Mr. Hunt. "You are one of those scientifically-minded people that I just give up. You are all for looking into things and probing things to the bottom, but this one thing you won't look at at all.

You just say there's nothing in it. To explain it is the best way to prove that, I should say. And then there *is* something like a psychical world, isn't there?"

The Doctor smiled.

"Do you remember," he asked, "what Thoreau on his death-bed said to his friend Parker Pillsbury? Pillsbury asked him if he saw anything on the other side—he was very nearly gone—and Thoreau whispered, 'One world at a time, Parker.' That's what I think; and I notice that when people fool with another world they generally go—*well,* dippy. I haven't any room for gods or ghosts. All I know is—Being Alive. That is man's appropriate job. Anything else is—er—not intended."

"Delicious!" said Mr. Hunt. "Perfectly delicious! Of course without gods nothing can be 'intended.'"

The Doctor looked a little foolish, and Mr. Bloggs took a hand.

"I guess," he said, "that there's just about as much goose-flesh ready to rise on people as there ever was. I heard a man say in a lecture—it was at Pontiac—that there was a French woman once—Madam Somebody—who said she was all through believing in ghosts, but was afraid of them just the same. That's about the way, I reckon, with most of us. I *did* have chills down my spine this morning and no mistake—whether it was ripples in the glass or not—and I'm not so dead sure that horse was sick. I guess there is a whole lot of things we don't know about, and I judge they ought to be looked into. But not by most of us unless we come up against them—like this morning. I wouldn't be a quitter when that happens—I'd look, all right—but as for hunting up such things,

that isn't for me. It's for some one who knows more than me. I think there's cussed little in this spiritualist business. I went to a séance once, and my brother Wesley—so they said—talked to me through the medium. It was all about blue suspenders! Yet I think even such things ought to be looked into—to see what they *are.*"

"You are two against one," said the Doctor, "and we can't get together. I say the way to kill superstition is to ignore it—and the way to perpetuate it and get caught in it is to attend to it, never mind with what high-sounding talk about 'psychical research' and all that. Of course we have the legacy of the past in us somewhat—the superstition that there is something somewhere beyond being alive, which is the one solid fact a man can go on. Better let our current Religion take care of that legacy. It's really

doing it mighty well, for it has shaved the other-world business down to two big ghost-stories—one nineteen hundred years behind us and the other on ahead, after we're dead—leaving life here for living, as it should be left. Good blinders, packing all the mystery into an innocuous block which doesn't interfere with life."

"An original apologetic," said Mr. Hunt, with an edge to his voice. "I assume that you think that there is no reality for us outside this life and this world."

"I think there is plenty of reality in the two," replied the Doctor, "plenty for anybody. As for secrets beyond, we shall make those out only when we make out what Mr. Wells calls 'the secret of the jumping cat within the human skull'—which will be never."

"Speaking of cats," said Mr.

Bloggs, as the three rose from their chairs, "we had one once—his name was Seth—and he used to have fits—the worst kind—and when he'd get through rearing around and come to himself again, he'd back, all tuckered out and draggled, into a corner—always *back,* 'understand. Seemed to think something had tackled him from the outside, and he was going to guard against another attack. Maybe that's the way it is here. Maybe I had something like a fit—something inside—after the coon's story this morning, and thought it was outside."

"I think it very likely," said Dr. Henderson, "and I think your analogy would cover a lot of other cases, too."

"I'm not so sure, though," went on Mr. Bloggs, "I'd 'a' *bet* I saw something—I'd almost bet *now* I saw something. Then there was the horse. I'm not so darn sure."

"*That,* I think," said the clergyman, "covers more cases than your cat. The hard churchmen, of course"—here a bow to the Doctor—"say bosh, and some people talk about the subliminal consciousness or dual personality as explanatory of strange things which come bolting into life—which is much the same, I think, as saying a thing 'goes by electricity'; but the real creed of the time on the 'supernormal'—which is, of course, just old-fashioned ghosts—is in your admirable phrase, we are—no matter how cool and emancipated—'not so darn sure.'"

"It's crawly, anyway," said Mr. Bloggs, "crawly anyway you look at it. Ghosts inside you are as bad as ghosts outside. Good night."

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Mr. Hunt, slowly preparing for bed, paused and addressed himself.

"I wonder," he said, "I wonder if this Doctor is right, and there is nothing in it all. I wonder if *my* Doctor was right with his big medical word for what happened to me. I wonder if Mr. Bloggs' cat explains everything."

Then, after a moment:

"I wonder if there's something outside of life which oughtn't to get at life, and which beats life down if it does."

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